

ADMINISTRATIVE - INTERNAL USE ONLY

PRIORITY

8 December 1982

NOTE FOR: All NIOs, Assistant NIOs & AGers

1. The Director has told me, and this message was amplified at today's NFIB, that he wants the estimates to be shorter. I would like you to go through those in the pipeline now and wield the blue pencil. Also consider such devices as publishing the Key Judgments separately from the text and putting as much backup material in annexes as possible.

2. This editorial process should be applied to all estimates in the pipeline including those nearly ready to go to NFIB.

3. The principal exception to this general rule is the major military estimates which everyone recognizes have a function which requires that a good deal of material be included in the text and they therefore often have to be long.

[Redacted Signature Box]

Henry S. Rowen
C/NIC

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DI Executive Secretary
 12/7/82
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Executive Registry

82-13361

7 December 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: National Intelligence Products

1. Pursuant to our discussion on Friday, this will provide you with some specifics on how the NIC process needs to be improved. There is a growing perception that we have been losing ground after accomplishing significant improvement in the national estimates and the process by which they are produced.

2. On leaving for Europe in early November, I asked [] to evaluate this perception and when I returned he gave me the seven-page memorandum of 15 November which is attached.

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3. I believe what we need is:

- Closer management and more careful and frequent review of the projects on which the NIOs are working.

- Greater effort on the part of the NIC leadership to use the NIC as a collegial body to critique important estimates.

- Stronger intervention in the drafting and coordination process to (a) bring out divergent views, and (b) reduce the wordsmithing.

- Greater effort to engage the interests and bring out the views of NFIB principals at an earlier stage.

- Closer editing to make the estimates briefer and more crisp, and

- More involvement by the Chairman and the NIOs in each estimate to provide quality control, get more vigorous use of evidence and more far-ranging perception and evaluation of alternative possibilities and outcomes and achieve greater policy relevance.

4. Finally, the Chairman and the Vice Chairman should know more quickly when an estimate is floundering and accelerate and step in to keep it on target and on schedule.

5. The recruitment of new blood into the NIC has also been disappointing.


William J. Casey

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15 November 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: DCI

FROM:

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SUBJECT: National Intelligence Products

It's widely agreed around here that the last 18 months have brought notable improvements in our national intelligence products--NIEs, SNIEs, IIMs, Memos to Holders. They are more relevant to policymaking, more timely, and in some cases better written. Moreover, total production is up sharply. However, it is also widely agreed that--as so often happens after a period of rapid improvement--our standards have lately begun to slip.

This memo is intended to help put us back on course. It is divided into four sections:

- an outline of shortcomings in the process by which national intelligence papers are produced;
- an outline of problems with the substance of these papers;
- a description of how the system works, as opposed to how the system is designed to work; and,
- a discussion of how to make things better, including specific recommendations.

All of what follows is distilled from talks with NIOs and others in the Intelligence Community who participate directly or indirectly in production, including members of the Senior Review Panel, members of NFIB, officials of NSA who deal with estimates, their DIA counterparts, and members of various DCI committees.

1. Shortcomings in the process by which national intelligence papers are produced:

- The elapsed time from draft concept paper to publication is often too long.
- Important facts are determined to be missing when it is too late to collect and include them.
- Often the participants, especially the principals, seem unclear as to the thrust of the paper until the very end.

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-- The work is badly paced--it always seems to jam up at the end, leaving principals too little time for reflection and drafters too little time to make suggested changes. As a result, changes that are made tend to be more cosmetic than substantive. The DCI is an especial victim of this bad pacing.

2. Problems with the substance of national intelligence products:

-- Many of them are too long.

-- They lack sufficient hard intelligence on which to base judgments.

-- Often the papers are badly organized; e.g., the reader plows through page after page of history before reading new material.

-- They are not always consistent--internally as well as with other recently published papers and all-source reporting.

-- Products are sometimes off-target, in the sense of not responding precisely to the needs of policymakers and to earlier guidance from the DCI.

-- Dissents are clearly noted, but the bases for these dissents are not always made clear--e.g., does the dissenter dispute a "fact," or does he accept the fact but reach a different judgment? Dissents are sometimes too cryptic.

-- "Key Judgments" sections are weak. In some cases they do not accurately reflect the text, in the sense of ignoring important conclusions and emphasizing minor ones. In other papers, Key Judgments are merely summaries of the text. Moreover, all these sections are getting awfully long.

-- Presentation of our products is deadly dull. The reader is confronted with page after page of type, and the temptation is strong to skim or skip.

3. How the System Works:

No two NIOs operate in precisely the same fashion, and no two papers are done in precisely the same way, even by the same NIO. But there is a distinct pattern to the process. It is a pattern that helps account for the shortcomings outlined above.

A project is under way when the NIO distributes to the Intelligence Community a draft of the concept paper and terms of reference that he, or his drafter, has written. These documents are also sent for comment to the Senior Review Panel and the DCI. At this point the various agencies and units choose their representatives for this particular product, who in turn are given responsibility for coordinating their organizations' positions on the drafts. In practice, it is usually the reps rather than the NFIB principals who review the draft concept paper and TOR. Proposals for change tend to be minimal, due partly to a lack

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of time and partly to the tendency of most NIOs to produce drafts so general, and so cryptic, as to preclude challenge. Yet another reason draft concept papers and TORs tend to go unchallenged in any fundamental way is a perception throughout the community that the drafts--circulated by the NIO prior to any discussions with intelligence community officials--closely reflect the DCI's approach. In effect, then, participating agencies tend to accept the thrust of draft concept papers and TORs; their quarrels involve details and wording. The NIO revises these drafts after a meeting with the reps, taking into account comments he has received from the Senior Review Panel and the DCI. The DCI's subsequent approval of the revised concept paper and TOR sets the drafting process in motion.

With very few exceptions, the collection system is not tasked during the course of an estimate. A draft is produced largely on what is already in hand. Hence, while the role of the reps during the drafting process varies, as a rule they do little. Except when specific chunks of text are assigned to them, there is little work for the reps but to put the drafter in touch with people at the reps' agency or branch, when the drafter has a question.

When the NIO receives a draft from the drafter, he makes whatever changes he sees fit, then distributes copies to the reps and calls a meeting to receive their comments. (It is worth noting that for technical distribution reasons three or four days often pass from the time an NIO orders his secretary to distribute a draft to the reps to the time they actually receive the draft. Thus the time available for reflection and comment is much less than one would think merely reviewing the schedules.) When a draft is acceptable to the reps and to the NIO, it is forwarded directly to the DCI. When the DCI signs off, the draft is sent to principals, and to the Senior Review Panel for comment. From this point, the only changes made are those ordered by the DCI--based on his reading, on the SRP comments, and on the NFIB meeting. Changes of substance are coordinated with the reps, usually by telephone. This is largely a pro forma exercise, since the impetus for the changes has come from the DCI.

When the final version of the paper is sent to the printing shop, the process ends.

4. Discussion and Recommendations:

The process falters at the start, during preparation of the concept paper and TOR. More precisely, the present system effectively excludes the NFIB principals from genuine participation in development of the concept paper and TOR. Partly for lack of time and partly because these drafts are perceived to reflect the DCI's approach, participating agencies and units tend to view the drafts as edicts rather than as first shots. And because some concept papers and TORs are so cryptic, it's hard to weigh in effectively even if one is willing to do so. The result of all this is that, with few exceptions, draft concept papers and TORs are reviewed by the reps and not by their principals. Thus in many cases the actual drafting of the final product is based on concept papers and TORs that do not reflect the principals' perceptions of how the issue should be approached and what the finished product should be. Result: unhappiness among NFIB principals with the drafts of the products. This unhappiness tends to emerge at NFIB meetings--often to the surprise of the NIO, NIC Chairman, and DCI.

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RECOMMENDATION #1: The energy and attention of the principals, especially the DCI, should be shifted from the back of the process to the front of it.

-- The DCI should require that concept papers and TORs be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to enable all principals to grasp both the intellectual and operational thrust of the forthcoming product. A TOR should not be approved until it makes clear what facts are needed to reach judgments on the issues outlined in the concept paper. A TOR should make clear what collection, if any, needs to be done.

RECOMMENDATION #2: When the DCI is satisfied with the concept paper and TOR, these documents should be tabled for discussion at a regular NFIB meeting.

-- This will encourage greater and more effective participation of all principals. The more attention and effort that principals devote to national intelligence products at the start, the less dissatisfaction there will be at the finish. Later, NFIB discussions of drafts will be more focused, better informed, more useful.

A second flaw in the system is that the various reps, especially those from NSA and DIA, are ill-suited to assure that the intellectual and operational resources of their respective agencies are fully utilized. The NSA unit responsible for community products (Q42) is in essence an internal coordinating unit. Upon receipt of a draft concept paper and TOR, Q42 designates an NSA line official to serve as the rep for this particular project. This official is usually a low-level or mid-level officer from a part of NSA that collects intelligence related to the subject at hand. The official, who in many cases lacks access to all relevant NSA collection, must rely on Q42 for guidance. Q42 itself is two rungs down from DIRNSA's office. Thus the NSA rep has little clout within his own agency, and often little experience with the estimates process. As a result, NSA's voice is weak.

At DIA, it is the assistant vice director for estimates--reporting to the vice director for foreign intelligence and through him to the DIA Director--who handles community projects. This DIA estimates unit is separate from the DIA unit that contains most of that agency's analysts, and is also separate from the Defense Intelligence Officers, who are roughly analogous to the NIOs. Hence the DIA reps are mid-level or low-level officials, lacking total access and not sufficiently experienced to assure that DIA's intellectual and operational expertise is brought fully to bear.

RECOMMENDATION #3: The Directors of NSA and DIA be encouraged to restructure their agencies' participation in national intelligence products.

-- The objective is reps who have the seniority to draw in the full resources of their agencies, and the experience to assure that the insights and judgments of their agencies receive full weight.

From start to finish of any national intelligence product, the NIO operates largely on his own. He sets the pace, makes editorial decisions, and determines when drafts of concept papers, TORs, and products themselves are ready for

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distribution. The result--and it is no reflection on the NIOs at all--is too much anarchy and unevenness. Moreover, at present the primary official to whom an NIO looks for guidance on content and for organizational support is the DCI. This is inefficient and unfair to both parties. (The lack of someone other than the DCI to turn to for guidance, for help in moving the various bureaucratic--in short, for the needed intellectual and operational support--was cited as a major problem by more than half a dozen NIOs.)

RECOMMENDATION #4: The DCI should require the NIC Chairman to play a more active, more substantive role in preparation of national intelligence products.

-- The NIC Chairman should set production schedules and enforce them. He should pace the estimates process to assure that principals have sufficient time for reflection when drafts are distributed, and that adequate time is available to accommodate changes fully, rather than by merely cutting or adding a sentence or two.

-- The NIC Chairman should not allow a draft to reach the DCI until in his judgment the draft meets the following criteria: it accurately reflects the concept paper and TOR, the necessary facts are included, the organization of the draft is sound, the draft is internally consistent and also consistent with recently-published papers and all source reporting--and superfluous words, paragraphs, and sections have been trimmed or eliminated.

-- The NIC Chairman should assure that the NIO functions not merely as a pundit, but as a synthesizer. National intelligence products should be more than one analyst's view, however competent that analyst may be. Thus, for example, dissents should be smoked out rather than deflected, with an eye toward a draft that outlines the relevant facts and articulates the Intelligence Community's full range of judgments.

-- The NIC Chairman should be directed to give special attention to the first draft of Key Judgments sections. At present Key Judgments oftentimes are, so to speak, pasted into place by the drafter and NIO at the last moment before distribution of a draft, on the implicit assumption that "we'll deal seriously with this later when everyone is satisfied with the text." In practice, the draft of a Key Judgments section takes on a life of its own. To a considerable degree, it's unfair to ask an NIO to produce a good Key Judgments section on his own; he is too close to the text to extract its essence, except by simple summary. And he is probably exhausted. What's needed is a fresh, detached eye between the NIO and the DCI. The NIC Chairman should fill this role.

-- The NIC Chairman should be directed to devote more attention to tasking the collection system. Some estimates are scheduled long before work actually begins. The NIC Chairman should look ahead at the year's schedule, to determine those estimates for which collection tasking would be useful and to begin the tasking process before actual work begins on a draft. This would help assure that relevant facts will be available when needed.

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-- The NIC Chairman should be directed to assure that post-mortems are held in accordance with regulations. Under the DCI's 1981 guidelines, the final step in production of any national intelligence product is a post-mortem to identify intelligence gaps and to task the collection system accordingly. In practice this last step is rarely taken. (Larry Gershwin holds post-mortems regularly.)

In general, the NIC itself should play a more active role in the collection process. This is a key part of what the NIC has been structured to do; in practice only a few NIOs, including Constantine Menges, pay much attention to directing the collection process. [Example: The issue of Sino-Soviet relations is of growing importance. But as we are organized along geographic lines, this issue falls between the stools. [redacted] and I are embarked on a project to determine how the intelligence community is organized to collect on this issue and to determine what kind of intelligence is available now and what, if anything, could be done to improve collection. We have already spent several enlightening hours at NSA, and we will make similar stops elsewhere in the community. This is the sort of project that should have been launched months ago, by the NIC.]

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RECOMMENDATION #5: The Senior Review Panel should play a more active role in the preparation of national intelligence products.

-- At present the SRP is largely ignored by the NIOs. The NIOs rarely consult SRP members when drafting concept papers, TORs, and products themselves. These documents are sent to the SRP in accordance with regulations, but often they are sent too late to make use of the SRP's suggestions. In general, the SRP is dealt with in a desultory fashion--as a nuisance to be ignored except when the DCI orders that SRP comments be adopted. This is an inexcusable waste of a valuable resource. SRP comments and suggestions should be actively sought, and the panel's formal comments should be taken into account before drafts are circulated throughout the community.

-- NIOs have noticed that the DCI has lately been paying more attention to the SRP's memos. This probably will result in more prior consultation. At present the SRP reports to the DCI through the NIC Chairman. The guidelines that established this relationship are scheduled for review by year's end. It might be useful to modify the guidelines so that the panel will report directly to the DCI.

RECOMMENDATION #6: The DCI should order NIOs to enhance the readability of national intelligence products by consulting with in-house CIA production experts, such as DDI's [redacted]

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-- Given our top-flight printing resources, we can make much better use of photos, graphics, charts, and so forth. Virtually no attention is paid now to presentation. But our readers are only human, and competition for their attention is ferocious. Without going overboard--and in addition to sharply cutting the length of our products--we can do much to improve their readability and hence their impact.

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One final point remains to be addressed. The National Intelligence Council has been structured to provide the DCI, through his NIOs, access to the best thinking available on any region or issue not only throughout the intelligence community but throughout the government and the country itself. The NIC has also been structured to enable this unit, through the NIOs, to drive the community's collection efforts. However, in practice the NIC has changed its organizational location but not its perspective. The top-down, broad strategic and intellectual sweep that ought to distinguish national intelligence products too often is absent. The products themselves--to be sure, with notable exceptions--are really no different from internal CIA, DIA, and State INR products. And the NIC's role in collection, while lately improving, is marginal. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is a perception throughout the intelligence community that despite an organizational change the NIC remains merely an adjunct of the DDI.

In sum, an important change in the intelligence community has been effected but not realized. To be sure, improvements have been made and they are noticeable in our products. But there is a huge gap between what was directed and what exists. There is a danger now that as the momentum from the organizational change subsides, this gap will persist and possibly widen.

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